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SUBJECT: A MEETING OF THE MINDS, BUT NOT HEADS OF STATE, ON
TRANS-SAHEL SECURITY

REF: BAMAKO 00881

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(U) Ministers from Algeria, Libya, Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, and Mali met in Bamako on November 11 to discuss a joint approach to improved Sahel-Saharan security. The Ministerial meeting was originally intended to occur on the eve of President Amadou Toumani Toure's much anticipated Head of State summit on Trans-Sahel security (Ref. A). Faced with increasingly complicated presidential scheduling conflicts, Mali moved ahead with the Ministerial portion but repackaged it as a "preparatory" meeting for the still unscheduled Head of State summit. Malian Minister of Foreign Affairs Moustapha Ouane hosted the Ministerial. Other attendees included the Algerian Minister for Maghreb and African Affairs, Abdelkader Messahel; the Burkinabe Minister for Regional Cooperation, Minata Samate; Libya's Secretary for African Affairs and International Cooperation, Ali Triki; Niger's Foreign Minister, Aichatou Mindaoudou; and the Chadian Foreign Minister, Djidda Moussa Outmane. Mali's Minister of Territorial Administration, General Kafougouna Kone, and Minister of Defense, Natie Pleah, also participated.

2.(U) During public remarks at the opening of the conference, Malian Foreign Minister Ouane observed that participating nations faced a number of threats including many that are specific to the 21st century. These threats, said Ouane, "heighten the difficulties States in the region are already facing in their fight against poverty." Ouane told the audience that "criminal networks continue to benefit from this situation, and are organizing to confront our countries' security forces in order to establish a lawless space to further illicit activities like cross-border banditry, terrorism, and trafficking of all kinds including arms, drugs and human beings." Ouane said the conference's objective was to turn the Sahel-Saharan region into a zone of stability and development. He also called for the "mobilization" of Mali's development partners to support government initiatives in agriculture, animal husbandry, water management, transportation, commerce, health, education, and professional training.

3.(U) The meeting produced two documents: a Bamako Declaration and an action plan on peace, security, and development in the region. The declaration and action plan appear to contain few specific recommendations beyond a renewed commitment to "taking appropriate measures" to combat terrorism, a call for greater information sharing, and the deployment of joint and/or simultaneous military patrols to strengthen cross-border security. The Ministerial's final statement also drew attention to shared socio-economic needs including infrastructure development, agricultural issues, food security, micro-finance, support for the health and education sectors, and job creation measures.

4.(C) Comment: Participating Ministers are now expected to submit the declaration and action plan to their respective Heads of State for review and ultimate approval. A date for an actual Head of State summit remains illusive. While the Ministerial was unfolding, one advisor to President Toure told the Embassy that a Head of State summit was looking less and less likely. On November 17 the Foreign Ministry's Director of Political Affairs, Sekouba Cisse, told the Embassy that presidential approval of the declaration and action plan were now top priority and hinted that an eventual Head of State summit could be reduced to a simple signing ceremony lasting no more than a few hours - provided there are no objections to the text drafted during the Ministerial.

Given the evident complexities of scheduling a presidential summit, together with the challenge of crafting a realistic plan for Sahel-Saharan security, a simple signing ceremony with one or two visiting Heads of State, as opposed to the entire crew of regional leaders as originally planned, may provide Mali with a face-saving way to claim success more than one year after President Toure first called for a Head of State summit.

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